**Foie gras production**

January 2015

To the Manager,

We wish to introduce ourselves as representatives of Sentient, The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics, an independent association of veterinarians, veterinary students and associate members. We are writing to share with you our grave concerns regarding foie gras production.

Foie gras is the result of one of the most inhumane uses of animals for food. To raise awareness of this issue, we are contacting all restaurants who may be offering foie gras on their menus. Its production is illegal in Australia and we are lobbying for a ban on its importation and sale, as was achieved in India in July 2014.

Foie gras is derived by force-feeding ducks and geese until their livers become grossly distended from fatty deposits, sometimes up to ten times the normal size. These birds suffer from fatty liver disease, a painful condition that is deliberately inflicted by being force-fed larger quantities of food than they would voluntarily eat. The force-feeding procedure involves passing a long tube into their stomachs under high pressure two or three times daily. This must overcome the birds’ natural gag reflex, so is highly aversive to them. Force-feeding is preceded by rough handling of the neck and causes pain and injury to the highly sensitive tongue, pharynx and oesophagus, often leaving blood on the feeding tube and exacerbating the pain of subsequent force-feedings. The tubes are not cleaned between birds, risking the spread of infectious disease. Force-feeding is associated with high mortality rates, and causes of death can include oesophageal perforation or aspiration pneumonia.

During the force-feeding period, birds are kept in intensive housing, restricted to barren individual or small group cages that offer no opportunities for normal social interactions or natural behaviours. This causes stress and frustration, and is particularly problematic for waterfowl, who require open water for maintaining eye, nostril and plumage condition and for engaging in instinctual behaviours. Birds in individual cages (approximately 80% of ducks) are unable to even flap their wings, turn around or stand normally.  The inability to spread their wings results in open-mouthed breathing as the birds attempt to thermoregulate. There is no opportunity to escape from peer aggression. The birds are often kept in darkness, except during feeding. Standing on inappropriate flooring, such as wooden slats or wire mesh, causes painful foot infections that can progress into the joints.

By the time of slaughter, the birds are in an advanced stage of liver disease. Many experience liver failure, difficulties with mobility and breathing due to abdominal distention, and sometimes secondary heart failure, kidney failure or liver haemorrhage. Due to the impact of their diet on calcium metabolism, birds are predisposed to bone fractures, with most suffering fractures to the wing when handled at slaughter.

Given the immense interest by consumers in the treatment of animals used for food, we are urging restaurants to demonstrate their commitment to animal welfare by removing foie gras from their menus. As this issue is of significance to the general public, we will publish a summary of responses from restaurants on our website to enable consumers to choose ethically.

Thank you for your attention to this and we look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

The Executive of Sentient, The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics

Dr Rosemary Elliott (President)

Dr Adele Lloyd (Vice President)

Dr Katherine van Ekert Onay (Secretary)

Mr Matthew Lloyd (Public Officer)